

When Should We Disagree? The Effect of Conflict on Team Identity in North American and

East Asian Teams

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Prior literature on conflict in teams has generally established that team heterogeneity (vs. homogeneity) influences the extent to which conflict occurs in teams. However, to date literature has not examined different types of culturally homogeneous teams' experience of team conflict and its effect on team identity. In two field studies, I look at the effect of team cultural composition and conflict on team identity (Study 1) and the effect of team cultural composition on the tendency to engage in conflict over time (Study 2). Consistent with the literature on culture and dialectical reasoning that suggests East Asians are better able to tolerate contradictions and mixed emotions which usually accompany conflict situations, my results revealed that conflict did not affect East Asian teams' identity, but it negatively impacted North American teams' identity. Further, my results revealed that North American teams reported higher levels of conflict during the initial team interaction, but East Asian teams reported higher levels of conflict during later team interactions. I discuss contributions to theory on team conflict and identity and implications for managing culturally homogeneous North American and East Asian teams.

Keywords: conflict, culture, team identity, time

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To my family and my friends

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INTRODUCTION

As the global market grows and firms seek to improve productivity and efficiency, many organizations are shifting towards a team-based structure. A major question for researchers and practitioners is how to decide the ideal team composition. While researchers have made strides in understanding the advantages and disadvantages of demographically heterogeneous teams versus homogeneous teams (e.g., Horwitz & Horwitz, 2007; Stahl, Maznevski, Voigt, & Jonsen, 2009; Watson, Kumar, & Michaelsen, 1993), there has been very little research on the different types of homogeneous teams. Given that not all homogeneous teams are equivalent, there may be different dimensions to team homogeneity. For instance, a team can be homogenous with regard to culture, gender, or age, and these different types of homogeneity might predict team processes differently or interact with team processes to predict different team outcomes. In the current paper, I focus on a more nuanced team composition: different types of culturally homogenous teams, and I examine during which point of the team interaction is conflict more likely to occur in different culturally homogenous teams as well as how the occurrence of conflict may have distinct influence on team outcomes. Thus, the first contribution of my study is to empirically demonstrate distinct team processes and outcomes in different types of homogeneous teams, namely culturally homogeneous North American and East Asian teams.

For team processes, I examine team conflict. Research has shown that working in teams can have both advantages and disadvantages. One of the most well studied disadvantages of working in team settings is conflict among team members. Conflict is broadly defined as perceived discrepant views or lack of compatibility among team members (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). Prior research on group conflict has typically shown that team composition is an antecedent of team conflict, for example, heterogeneity in teams is related to higher levels of

team conflict in comparison to homogeneous teams (Jehn, Chadwick, & Thatcher, 1997). As noted above, prior research on team conflict has focused predominantly on the likelihood of conflict in heterogeneous teams (e.g., Li & Hambrick, 2005; Thatcher, Jehn, & Zanutto, 2003), or the comparison between heterogeneous and homogeneous teams (e.g., Chatman & Flynn, 2001). However, I argue that conflict may occur differently in culturally homogeneous East Asian versus North American teams depending on the stage of team interaction. Based on prior cross-cultural research that has found higher levels of harmony maintenance values in East Asian compared to North American cultures (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Tafarodi et al., 2011), I argue that during the initial stage of team interaction when the situation is ambiguous, members of East Asian teams will rely on their culturally normative values to maintain harmony, thus engaging in less conflict compared to members of North American teams. However, throughout the team tenure, as team members become more comfortable with one another and loosen up their impression-management concerns, I expect members of East Asian teams to engage in more conflict compared to members of North American teams, because conflict and open debates are embedded in the Confucian notion of harmony (Leung, Tremain-Koch, & Lu, 2002). Thus, by implementing a longitudinal design, the second contribution of the current study is to test the dynamic nature of conflict occurring over time in culturally homogeneous North American and East Asian teams.

Lastly, I examine team identity as an outcome variable. As noted in a recent meta-analysis by de Wit, Greer, and Jehn (2012), relationship and task conflicts are more negatively related to proximal team outcomes (e.g., team identity) than distal team outcomes (e.g., performance), therefore, in the current paper, I focus on a more proximal team outcome, team identity. Team identity can be defined as part of an individual's self-concept, "which derives from his or her

knowledge of his or her membership in a team, together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Jehn & Bezrukova, 2010, p.28, adapted from Tajfel, 1982). When team members have a stronger team identity, their goals and values are aligned, thus, they work toward a superordinate goal and achieve greater team performance (Jehn & Bezrukova, 2010). While conflict in general may negatively impact team identity (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn, 1995; Jehn, Greer, Levine, & Szulanski, 2008), I argue that these effects will be attenuated in culturally homogeneous East Asian teams. My logic is supported by research on the dialectical-self that shows East Asians can tolerate both positive and negative emotional states simultaneously (Spencer-Rodgers, Peng, & Wang, 2010; Spencer-Rodgers, Williams, & Peng, 2010). I argue that East Asian team members will be better equipped to tolerate conflict while maintaining a positive attitude and team identity, such that conflict is not as damaging to them as it is to North American team members. Thus, the third contribution of my paper is to demonstrate that conflict impacts team identity differently in culturally homogeneous North American and East Asian teams.

In the remainder of my paper, I begin by reviewing the literature on team identity and conflict, and the moderating role of culture. Next, I discuss implications of these cultural variables for temporal aspects of conflict in culturally homogeneous North American and East Asian teams. In Study 1, I present a field study examining team cultural composition as a moderator of the association between conflict and team identity. In Study 2, in a longitudinal field study, in addition to testing team cultural composition as a moderator of the relation between conflict and team identity, I also test the temporal aspect of North American and East Asian teams’ tendency to engage in conflict.

Conflict, Culture, and Team Identity

The group conflict literature has generally distinguished two types of conflict: relationship conflict and task conflict (Jehn, 1997; Jehn & Mannix, 2001). Relationship conflict involves personal issues such as members' dislike and feelings of annoyance (Amason, 1996; Jehn & Mannix, 2001). Task conflict involves differences in the task definition and procedures (Jehn & Mannix, 2001). Prior findings on conflict and team outcomes are mixed: some research has shown that task conflict and relationship conflict are detrimental to team outcomes (Amason, 1996; Brief & Weiss, 2002; Jehn, 1995, 1997), whereas other studies have shown that task conflict can be beneficial to team outcomes (Amason, 1996; Jehn, 1995; Behfar, Mannix, Peterson, & Trochim, 2011), and there are boundary conditions to the negative relation between relationship conflict and team outcomes (Rispens, Greer, Jehn, & Thatcher, 2011). Although the findings are mixed, a meta-analysis by De Dreu and Weingart (2003) suggests that both relationship and task conflict are detrimental for team outcomes. Moreover, a recent meta-analysis by de Wit and colleagues (2012) has shown that relationship and task conflict have more negative consequences to proximal team outcomes (e.g., team satisfaction) than distal team outcomes (e.g. team performance). In the current paper, I ask when team conflict does and does not have negative repercussions on proximal team outcomes, and I argue that team cultural composition moderates the negative relation between team conflict and team identity.

According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and self-categorization theory (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Turner, 1984), when there is a superordinate team identity, team members are cohesive and striving to achieve a common goal. Often times, identification with the team can act as "social glue" to keep team members working toward a common goal (Jehn & Bezrukova, 2010; Van Vugt & Hart, 2004). However, when conflict erupts, especially if it is

relational in nature, team identification often breaks down, and team members are more likely to focus on personal issues and take sides instead of working towards a common goal. I extend this prior literature to predict that although team conflict may negatively impact team identity for culturally homogeneous North American teams, I do not expect it to affect team identity for East Asian teams.

I ground my reasoning in the literature in culture and the dialectical reasoning. Culture is commonly defined as a system of shared beliefs and values that direct people's actions by providing meaning to social events (Hofstede, 1985). Thus, culturally shared values influence the ways in which people interpret social phenomena and behaviour in response to social events such as an interpersonal conflict. One aspect of culture that should influence how people view and react to conflict is dialectical reasoning. Research has typically shown that East Asians endorse stronger dialectical style of reasoning compared to North Americans (e.g., Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2010a). Dialectical reasoning is a system of thought characterized by acceptance of contradictions and inconsistencies in one's environment (Peng & Nisbett, 1999; Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2010b). High dialectical thinkers tend to reconcile opposing views and contradictions by seeking the middle ground or accepting that both can exist simultaneously. In contrast, low dialectical thinkers tend to accept only one side as true while rejecting the other side (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2010b). For example, Peng and Nisbett (1999) found that high dialectical thinkers (e.g., Chinese), relative to low dialectical thinkers (e.g., Americans), were more likely to accept two opposing statements as true; preferred dialectical proverbs that accept rather than deny contradictions (e.g., "Sorrow is born out of excessive joy") to nondialectical proverbs that reflect the rule on noncontradiction (e.g., "Half a loaf is better than none").

Relating cultural differences in dialectical reasoning to conflict, Leung, Brew, Zhang, and Zhang

(2011) suggested that Chinese people perceive harmony as “a two-edged sword with both pros and cons.” Moreover, research on culture and emotion has generally shown that, compared to their North American peers, East Asians (high dialectical thinkers) tend to be more comfortable with mixed emotions (e.g., Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000; Schimmack, Oishi, & Diener, 2002), that usually accompany conflict situations. In contrast, given that North Americans are low on dialectical reasoning and as such have low tolerance for contradictions and mixed emotions, they are likely to perceive only a negative side of conflict. As such, team conflict may negatively impact team outcomes of North American teams.

Moreover, I offer the same prediction for both relationship and task conflict, because both types of conflict involve disagreement with team members, and have generally been associated with poor team outcomes. Given that East Asians are more tolerant of contradictions and mixed emotions, they should be better able to tolerate the negative aspects of both relationship and task conflict while maintaining a positive attitude and identity toward the team. With this, I put forward the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: Team cultural composition moderates the relation between relationship conflict and team identity such that the relation is more negative for North American teams than East Asian teams.

Hypothesis 1b: Team cultural composition moderates the relation between task conflict and team identity such that the relation is more negative for North American teams than East Asian teams.

The Dynamic Nature of Culture and Conflict

I have noted previously that prior research has not examined adequately the dynamic aspects of group conflict. As Jehn and Mannix (2001) pointed out, rather than focusing the static level of conflict, research should include temporal aspects and look at how conflict occurs over several points in time during group interaction. Indeed, in a longitudinal study, Jehn and Mannix (2001) found that group conflict is dynamic such that teams tend to engage in conflict at different points in time. Moreover, a longitudinal study by Goncalo, Polman, and Maslach (2010) has shown that the timing of team conflict impacts team performance. Farh, Lee, and Farh (2010) also found that the intensity of conflict has an impact on team outcome when it occurs at early rather than later phases of team tenure. I extend this prior literature of conflict over time by developing predictions for when conflict is most likely to occur in culturally homogeneous East Asian versus North American teams.

The majority of prior research has found that East Asians are more likely than North Americans to avoid conflict when interacting with others (Morris et al., 1998; Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). For example, studies have shown that, compared to North Americans, Chinese and Japanese reported a higher level of conflict avoidance (Morris et al., 1998; Ohbuchi & Takahashi, 1994). These findings are explained by cross-cultural research that has generally shown that East Asians place a greater emphasis on group harmony, interdependence, and conformity than North American cultures (e.g., Kirkbride, Tang, & Westwood, 1991). Thus, in conflict situations, East Asians tend to avoid confrontations so that they do not disrupt harmonious relationships. In contrast, research conducted in a Western context has typically shown that North Americans are more comfortable with confrontation (De Dreu & Van de Vliert, 1997). Given that North Americans value individualism, independence, and free expression of

opinions (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), these values along with a high personal achievement orientation mean that in conflict situations, North Americans would be more apt to engage in conflict than East Asians.

I expect these cultural patterns to be most evident in early stages of team interaction, when people are not yet familiar with each other and team norms are ambiguous. Thus, I predict that during the initial stage of team interaction, East Asians, who are influenced by the collectivistic characteristic of the East Asian culture that emphasizes the establishment and maintenance of interdependent and harmonious relationships, will strive to maintain group harmony by avoiding confrontation. In contrast, in the initial stage of team interaction, I expect North Americans will be more likely than East Asians to engage in conflict, which is consistent with the previous research (e.g., Morris et al, 1998, Ohbuchi & Takahashi, 1994).

Despite a general tendency for East Asians to avoid conflict more than North Americans, Leung and colleagues (2002) have noted that Confucian philosophy, while stressing harmony, also allows for the expression of diverse viewpoints. Moreover, recent research by Leung and colleagues (2011) dispelled the simple notion that East Asians tend to value harmony wholeheartedly by suggesting that Chinese people see both the positive and negative side of conflict, a view that supports my prior theorizing about dialectical reasoning and tolerance of conflict. Therefore, I predict that throughout the team tenure, as team members become more familiar with one another, members of East Asian teams will engage in more conflict compared to members of North American teams. I reason that, given prior research has shown that East Asians are able to see both the beneficial side and detrimental side of conflict, once the team has established group harmony, they may perceive it is safe to engage in conflict.

Hypothesis 2a: There are cross-cultural differences in East Asian and North American teams' tendency to engage in relationship conflict throughout team tenure, such that at onset, East Asian teams report less relationship conflict than North American teams, whereas at later time periods, East Asian teams report more relationship conflict than North American teams.

Hypothesis 2b: There are cross-cultural differences in East Asian and North American teams' tendency to engage in task conflict throughout team tenure, such that at onset, East Asian teams report less task conflict than North American teams, whereas at later time periods, East Asian teams report more task conflict than North American teams.

Overview of the Research Strategy

I examined my hypotheses in two studies. In a field study (Study 1), I examined the role of team cultural composition on team conflict and team identity to see whether there is an interaction between team conflict (relationship and task) and team cultural composition (East Asian vs. North American) in predicting team identity in student teams that worked together during one academic semester. That is, I tested Hypotheses 1a and 1b.

In a longitudinal field study (Study 2), I examined the temporal aspect of relationship and task conflict in East Asian and North American teams over time. That is, I tested whether conflict in early team stages is more common for North American teams whereas conflict in later team stages is more common for East Asian teams (Hypotheses 2a and 2b). Moreover, I tested whether the results of Study 1 replicated in the longitudinal sample.

Study 1 Method

Participants

Participants were 108¹ undergraduate students (37 % male; Age range = 19-25, $M = 21.46$, $SD = 4.14$) enrolled in an upper-year organizational psychology course at a large North American university, forming 28 four-person teams.

Procedure

The study was conducted as a part of in-class team learning experience over one academic semester. At the beginning of the semester, all students were told that they would be assigned into teams and engage in weekly team activities over the term (e.g., experiential exercises and case analyses). They were asked to complete three questionnaires over the term, reflecting on their cultural background and team interactions.

The first questionnaire was administered in the third week of the term. The questionnaire assessed students' cultural background and other relevant demographics, which were later used to place students into teams. Based on participants' cultural background, they were placed into one of the two types of four-person teams: homogeneous North American teams and homogeneous East Asian teams. Homogeneous North American teams consisted of North American participants who were born and raised in a North American country (such as Canada and the USA) almost all their life except vacations. Homogeneous East Asian teams consisted of participants who were born and raised in an East Asian country (such as China, South Korea, and Japan), and lived in North America less than 10 years, assuming they would be less acculturated and retain their East Asian cultural values. In total, there were 17 homogeneous North American and 11 homogeneous East Asian teams. Remaining students were put into multicultural teams

¹ There were 112 participants who participated in the team study, but four participants from different teams did not complete the online survey.

and were not included in analyses for the purpose of the study. After the seventh week of class, participants filled out an online survey assessing their perceived relationship and task conflict. Three weeks later, participants filled out another online survey measuring perceived team identity.

Measures

Team conflict. I used three-item scales to assess relationship conflict (e.g., “How much relationship tension is there in your group?”) and task conflict (e.g., “How often are there disagreements about who should do what in your work group?”) (Jehn, 1995). Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*a great deal*).

Team identity. I used a three-item scale to measure the extent to which members identify with their team (E.g., “The feeling that we are all sharing a common set of beliefs and values was high in my group” and “Our group had a strong sense of what it is”) (Early & Mosakowski, 2000). Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Study 1 Results

Preliminary Analyses

My hypotheses were specified at the group level. However, team conflict and team identity measures were collected at the individual level. As such, I aggregated data to the group level to test my hypotheses. Before aggregating team conflict and team identity measures to the group level, I computed the James, Demaree, and Wolf (1993) index of within-group agreement $r_{WG(j)}$ for relationship and task conflict and team identity for each of the 28 teams in my analyses. The $r_{WG(j)}$ indexes were .85, .79, and .95, respectively, for relationship conflict, task conflict, and team identity justifying aggregation.

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, alphas, and correlations of the measured variables. Preliminary analysis showed that demographic characteristics such as gender (-.07) and age (-.18) were not significantly correlated with team identity, therefore I did not include them as control variables. Consistent with past findings, an examination of the zero-order correlations showed that relationship and task conflict were positively correlated ($r = .83, p < .01$) (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; de Wit et al., 2012).

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Zero Order Correlations and Alphas (Study 1)

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Team type	.38	.49	--			
2. Relationship conflict	2.09	.99	.05	.80		
3. Task conflict	2.49	.99	.08	.83**	.84	
4. Team identity	3.80	.72	.11	-.71**	-.60**	.91

Note: $N = 28$. The numbers in bold on the diagonal are Cronbach's alphas. Team type is a dummy variable coded as 0 for North American teams and 1 for East Asian teams.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Hypotheses Testing

To test the hypothesis that team conflict negatively influences North American teams' identity, but it does not influence East Asian teams' identity, I conducted hierarchical moderated regression analyses. Following procedures outlined by Aiken and West (1991), first, I mean-centered predictor variables, relationship and task conflict. Second, I created interaction terms from the cross product of centered continuous variables and the team type variable (homogeneous North American team codes as 0 vs. homogeneous East Asian team coded as 1). In the first step, I entered team type and team conflict. In the second step, I entered the interaction term (Team Type x Conflict).

Table 2 and Figure 1 and 2 present the results of the hierarchical multiple regression. In testing whether team cultural composition moderates the negative relation between relationship conflict and team identity (Hypotheses 1a), as predicted, there was a significant

interaction between team cultural composition and relationship conflict in predicting team identity, $\beta = .59, p < .02$ (see Table 2 for a full regression model). To interpret this interaction, I solved for regression equations at higher (one standard deviation above the mean) and lower (one standard deviation below the mean) levels of relationship conflict (see Figure 1). A simple slopes analysis (Aiken & West, 1991) showed that, as expected, as relationship conflict became higher, North American teams experienced significantly lower team identity compared to when relationship conflict was low ($t = -6.23, p < .001$), whereas relationship conflict did not influence team identity of East Asian teams ($t = -.21, p = .84$). Thus, Hypotheses 1a was supported.

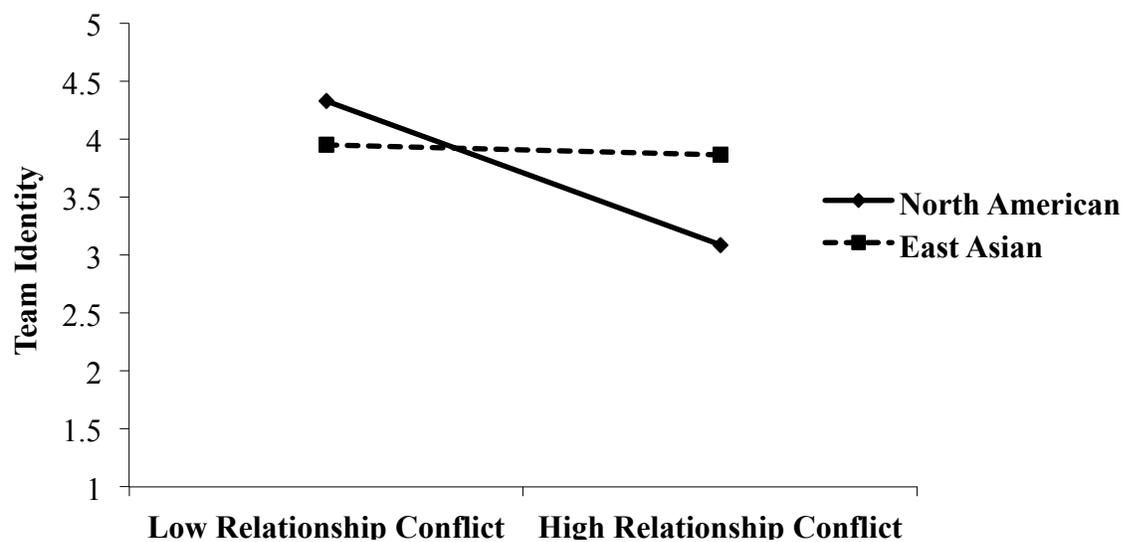


Figure 1. Relationship conflict and team type in predicting team identity (Study 1).

Table 2

Multiple Regression Analyses: The Moderating Effect of Team Cultural Composition on the Relation between Team Conflict (Relationship and Task) and Team Identity Team Identity (Study 1)

Predictor	Conflict type			
	Relationship conflict		Task conflict	
	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Step 1	.52**		.38**	
Intercept		3.71**		3.7**
Team type		.21		.23
Conflict		-.52**		-.44**
Step 2	.10*		.08 [†]	
Intercept		3.71**		3.70**
Team type		.20		.21
Conflict		-.63**		-.59**
Team Type x Conflict		.59**		.46 [†]
Overall R^2	.62		.47	
N	28		28	

Note: Values are unstandardized regression coefficients (standard error estimates listed in parentheses). All lower-order terms used in interactions were centered prior to analysis. Team type is a dummy variable coded as 0 for North American teams and 1 for East Asian teams.

[†] $p = .06$ * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

In testing whether team cultural composition moderates the negative relation between task conflict and team identity (Hypotheses 1b), as predicted, there was a marginally significant interaction between team cultural composition and task conflict in predicting team identity, $\beta = .45, p = .06$ (see Table 2 for a full regression model). To interpret this interaction, I solved for regression equations at higher (one standard deviation above the mean) and lower (one standard deviation below the mean) levels of task conflict (see Figure 2). A simple slopes analysis (Aiken & West, 1991) showed that, as expected, as task conflict became higher, North American teams experienced significantly lower team identity compared to when relationship conflict was low ($t = -4.44, p < .001$), whereas task conflict did not influence team identity of East Asian teams ($t = -.75, p = .46$). Thus, Hypotheses 1b was supported.

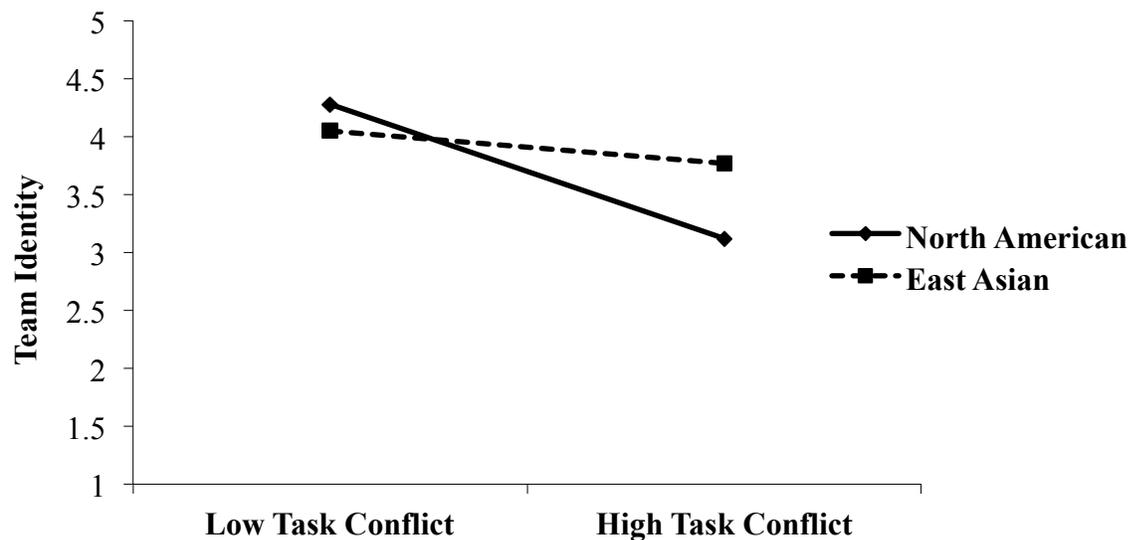


Figure 2. Task conflict and team type in predicting team identity (Study 1).

Study 1 Discussion

Results of Study 1 show that team cultural composition moderated the relationship between conflict and team identity such that high levels of relationship and task conflict did not significantly influence team identity for East Asian teams, but they did negatively influence team identity for North American teams.

Study 1 offers preliminary evidence that conflict influences team identity differently for different culturally homogenous teams. Thus, in contrast to past research that has mostly focused on differences between heterogeneous and homogeneous teams and suggested that the effects of conflict are more detrimental for heterogeneous teams, my study demonstrated that conflict in homogeneous teams may also have detrimental effects on team outcome, and those effects depend on team cultural composition.

One notable limitation of Study 1 is that the sample size is relatively small ($N = 28$). Moreover, the predicted interaction of team type with task conflict was only marginally significant, which could be due to slightly lower within group agreement value for task conflict ($r_{wg} = .61$). In Study 2, by employing a larger sample size and a longitudinal design, I aim to replicate Study 1 findings and to further examine the temporal aspect of conflict in homogeneous North American and East Asian teams to answer the question when during team interaction do North American and East Asian teams choose to engage in and avoid conflict.

Study 2 Method

Participants

Participants were 178 undergraduate students (38% males; Age range = 19-26, $M = 22.13$, $SD = 6.21$) enrolled in an upper-year organizational psychology course at a large North American university, forming 46 four-person teams.

Procedure

As with Study 1, Study 2 was conducted as a part of in-class group learning experience over one academic semester. At the beginning of the semester, students were told that they would be assigned into teams and engage in weekly team activities over the term, completing a total of six questionnaires over the term, reflecting on their team interactions.

The first questionnaire assessed students' cultural background and demographics and was administered in the third week of the term (Time 1). I used the same procedure of team assignment as in Study 1, resulting in 29 homogeneous North American and 17 homogeneous East Asian teams.

In the fourth week of the semester, students met their group members for the first time during a tutorial session. Over the semester, students participated in various team activities including experiential exercises and case analyses. They completed measures of relationship conflict and task conflict five times during the semester: week five (Time 2), week seven (Time 3), week eight (Time 4), week ten (Time 5), and week eleven (Time 6). Participants also completed the measure team identity at week eleven (Time 6). To reduce carry-over effects, I randomized the order of the scales. At the end of the term, students were debriefed in class.

Measures

I used the same measures as in Study 1 to assess team conflict and team identity.

Study 2 Results

Preliminary Analyses

As with Study 1, I computed $r_{WG(j)}$ for relationship and task conflict and team identity for each of the 46 teams in our analyses. Given relationship and task conflict were measured five times, I first computed the $r_{WG(j)}$ indexes for relationship and task conflict from Time 2 to Time 6 from Time 2 to Time 6, I then averaged the five $r_{WG(j)}$ values, yielding $r_{WG(j)}$ of .77 and .73 for relationship and task conflict respectively. The average $r_{WG(j)}$ index for team identity was .72. Given I have reasonably strong within-group agreement (Bliese, 2000), aggregation of the above measures to group level is justified.

Table 3 presents the means, standard deviations, alphas, and correlations of the measured variables. Preliminary analyses showed that demographic characteristics such as gender ($r = .13$) and age ($r = -.04$) were not significantly correlated with team identity, therefore I did not include them as control variables.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics and Zero Order Correlations (Study 2)

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Team type	.37	.49	--			
2. Relationship conflict (Time 6)	1.54	.49	.28	.85		
3. Task conflict (Time 6)	2.21	.63	.31*	.56**	.84	
4. Team identity	3.78	.70	.12	-.47**	-.58**	.88

Note: $N = 46$. The numbers in bold on the diagonal are the alphas at individual level. Team type is a dummy variable coded as 0 for North American teams and 1 for East Asian teams.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Hypothesis Testing

First, I examined whether the moderating effect of team type on team conflict² and team identity in Study 1 is replicated by conducting hierarchical moderated regression analyses. I measured team identity at the end of team tenure (Time 6) to capture effects of the overall team interaction. I followed the same analytic procedures outlined in Study 1 (Aiken & West, 1991).

Table 4 and Figure 3 and 4 present the results of the hierarchical multiple regression. In testing whether team cultural composition moderates the negative relation between relationship conflict and team identity (Hypothesis 1b), as predicted, there was a significant interaction between team cultural composition and relationship conflict in predicting team identity, $\beta = .93$, $p = .01$ (see Table 4 for a full regression model). To interpret this interaction, I solved for regression equations at higher (one standard deviation above the mean) and lower (one standard deviation below the mean) levels of relationship conflict (see Figure 3). A simple slopes analysis (Aiken & West, 1991) showed that, as expected, as relationship conflict became higher, North American teams experienced significantly lower team identity compared to when relationship conflict was low ($t = -5.07$, $p < .001$), whereas relationship conflict did not influence team identity for East Asian teams ($t = -.22$, $p = .82$). Thus, Hypothesis 1a was supported.

² Preliminary analyses using relationship conflict and task conflict from Time 2 – 6 revealed similar interaction patterns. For simplicity sake, we only used relationship conflict and task conflict measures from Time 6 in testing my hypotheses.

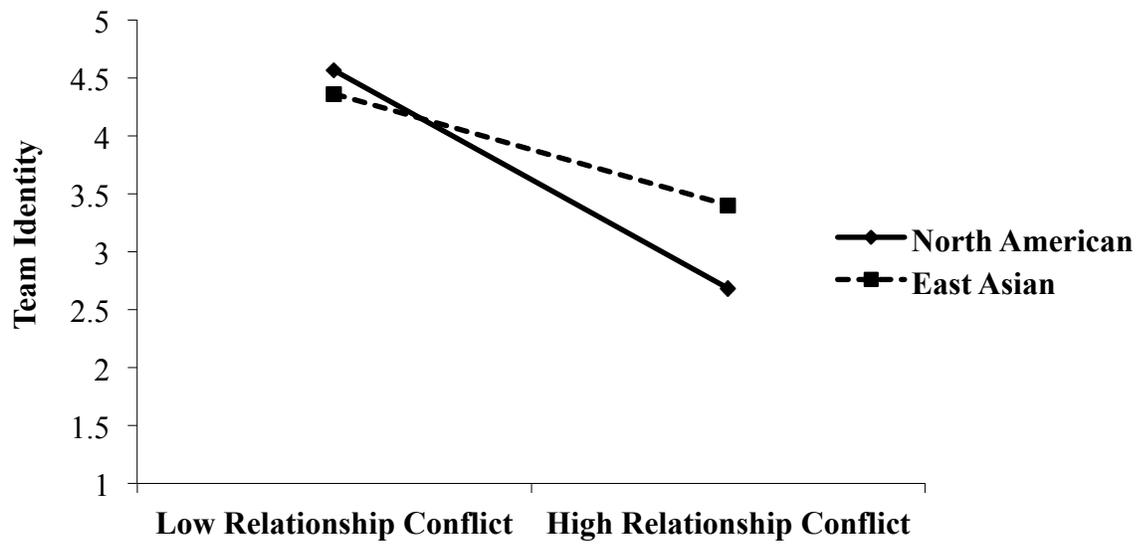


Figure 3. Relationship conflict and team type in predicting team identity (Study 2).

Table 4

Multiple Regression Analyses: The Moderating Effect of Team Cultural Composition on the Relation between Team Conflict (Relationship and Task) and Team Identity Team Identity (Study 2)

Predictor	Conflict type			
	Relationship conflict		Task conflict	
	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Step 1	.29**		.43**	
Intercept		3.65**		3.63**
Team type		.34*		.41*
Conflict		-.66**		-.64**
Step 2	.12*		.07*	
Intercept		3.62**		3.59**
Team type		.26		.39*
Conflict		-1.91**		-1.47**
Team Type x Conflict		.94**		.54*
Overall R^2	.41		.50	
n	46		46	

Note: Values are unstandardized regression coefficients (standard error estimates listed in parentheses). All lower-order terms used in interactions were centered prior to analysis. Team type is a dummy variable coded as 0 for North American teams and 1 for East Asian teams.

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

In testing whether team cultural composition moderates the negative relation between task conflict and team identity (Hypotheses 1b), as predicted, there was a significant interaction between team cultural composition and task conflict in predicting team identity, $\beta = .55, p = .02$ (see Table 4 for a full regression model). To interpret this interaction, I solved for regression equations at higher (one standard deviation above the mean) and lower (one standard deviation below the mean) levels of task conflict (see Figure 4). A simple slopes analysis (Aiken & West, 1991) showed that, as task conflict became higher, both North American teams ($t = -5.70, p < .001$) and East Asian teams ($t = -2.57, p = .02$) experienced significantly lower team identity compared to when task conflict was low, task conflict affected East Asian teams to a lesser extent than it affected North American teams. Thus, Hypotheses 1b was supported.

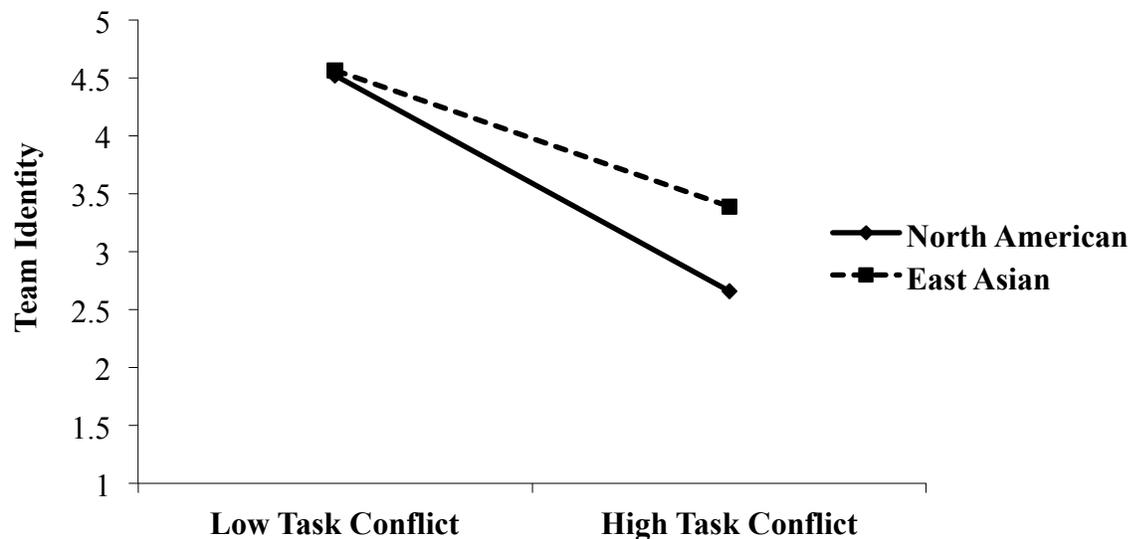


Figure 4. Task conflict and team type in predicting team identity (Study 2).

Table 5 and Figure 5 and 6 present the results of the repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) with teams' conflict level (relationship and task conflict) over the five time points as within-subjects factor, and team type as the between-subjects factor. In testing whether there is a difference in levels of relationship conflict in North American and East Asian team over time (Hypothesis 2a), consistent with our predictions, there was a significant interaction between team type and time on relationship conflict $F(4, 42) = 2.56, p = .04$. Follow-up analyses revealed that at Time 2 North American teams reported engaging in more relationship conflict than East Asian teams ($M_{North American} = 3.25, SD_{North American} = .84; M_{East Asian} = 2.62, SD_{East Asian} = .75$), $t(44) = 2.17, p = .12$; whereas at Time 3 North American teams reported engaging in significantly lower relationship conflict than East Asian teams ($M_{North American} = 1.31; SD_{North American} = .32; M_{East Asian} = 1.62, SD_{East Asian} = .45, t(44) = -2.72, p = .003$. At time 6, North American teams also reported engaging in lower relationship conflict than East Asian teams ($M_{North American} = 1.46, SD_{North American} = .48; M_{East Asian} = 1.68, SD_{East Asian} = .49$), $t(44) = -2.06, p = .06$. Thus, Hypothesis 2a was supported.

Table 5

Levels of Team Conflict (Relationship and Task) Over Time for North American and East Asian Teams

	Relationship Conflict				Task Conflict			
	North American		East Asian		North American		East Asian	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Time 2	3.25	(.84)	2.63	(1.08)	3.62	(.75)	3.01	(.78) *
Time 3	1.31	(.32)	1.62	(.45) **	2.26	(.62)	2.52	(.91) *
Time 4	1.60	(.63)	1.63	(.31)	2.10	(.53)	2.31	(.45)
Time 5	1.76	(1.23)	2.30	(1.32)	2.11	(.66)	2.56	(.85) *
Time 6	1.46	(.48)	1.68	(.49) †	2.06	(.52)	2.46	(.74) *

Note.

† $p = .06$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

In testing whether there is a difference in levels of task conflict in North American and East teams over time (Hypothesis 2b), consistent with my predictions, there was a significant interaction between team type and time on task conflict $F(4, 42) = 4.38, p = .002$. Follow-up analyses revealed that at time 2 North American teams reported engaging in significantly more task conflict ($M_{North\ American} = 3.62, SD_{North\ American} = .75$) than East Asian teams ($M_{East\ Asian} = 3.01, SD_{East\ Asian} = .78$), $t(44) = 2.66, p = .03$; whereas at Time 3, North American teams reported engaging in significantly task conflict ($M_{North\ American} = 2.26, SD_{North\ American} = .62$) than East Asian teams ($M_{East\ Asian} = 2.52, SD_{East\ Asian} = .91$), $t(44) = -1.48, p = .05$. At Time 6, North American teams also reported engaging in significantly lower task conflict ($M_{North\ American} = 2.06, SD_{North$

American = .52) than East Asian teams ($M_{East\ Asian} = 2.46$, $SD_{East\ Asian} = .74$), $t(44) = -2.06$, $p = .04$.

Thus, hypothesis 2b was supported.

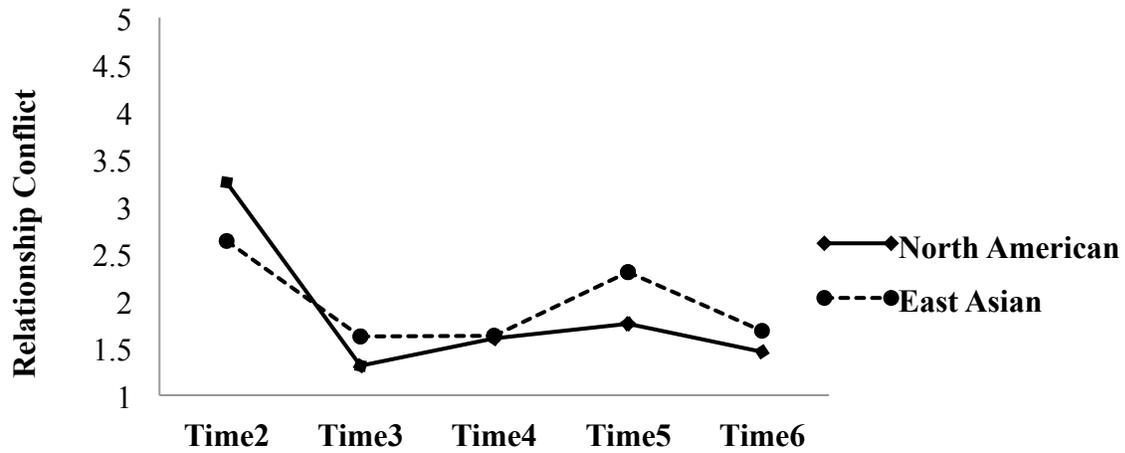


Figure 5. Relationship conflict in North American and East Asian teams over time (Study 2).

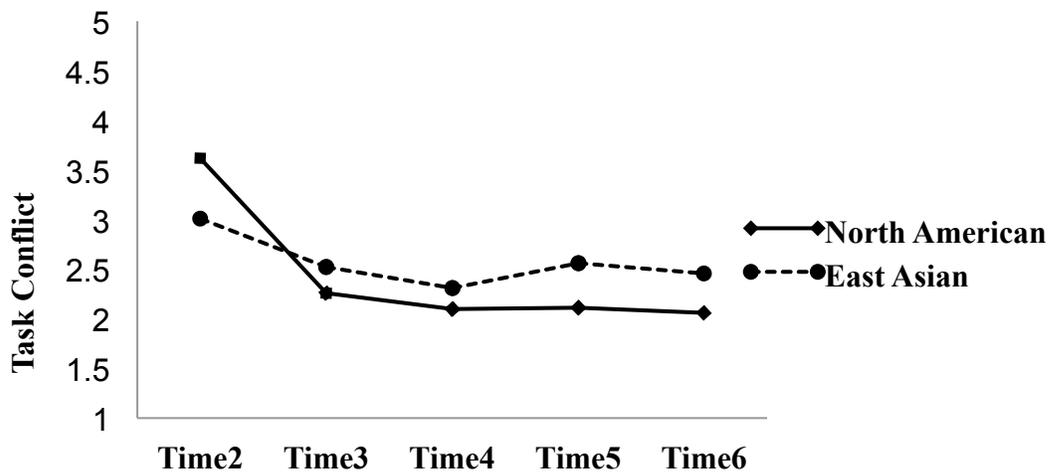


Figure 6. Task conflict in North American and East Asian teams over time (Study 2).

Although I also examined the differences between North American and East Asian teams in reported levels of conflict during other time points (e.g., Time 4 and 5), I did not think these time points are pertinent in testing my hypotheses and thus did not have any predictions relating to the middle time periods. In contrast, Time 2 represents the onset of team interaction, Time 3 represents the team interaction when members are more familiar with each other, whereas Time 6 represents a more established period of team existence, which are the key time points in testing my hypotheses.

Study 2 Discussion

Study 2 extends the previous research on culture and conflict by demonstrating a temporal effect of conflict in different types of culturally homogeneous teams to answer the question *when* North Americans and East Asians choose to avoid and engage in conflict, and *how* conflict influence team identity differently for North American and East Asian teams.

Results of Study 2 show that during the initial stage of team tenure, North American teams experienced more team conflict (relationship and task) compared to East Asian teams, but at later times, East Asian teams experienced more team conflict (relationship and task) than North American teams. Moreover, despite previous research suggesting that conflict is related to negative team outcomes (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; de Wit et al., 2012), my results show that team identity for East Asian teams was not affected by relationship conflict, whereas team identity for North American teams was negatively affected by relationship conflict, a result that was consistent with Study 1. In addition, although experiencing task conflict affected both East Asians and North Americans teams' reported team identity, it affected North American teams to a greater extent than it affected East Asian teams. A potential explanation for this could be that relationship conflicts is usually more interpersonal and emotional than task conflicts (Jehn, 1995, 1997; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003), and given past research suggests that East Asians are better able to tolerate contradictions in their emotional experience compared to their North American peers (e.g., Markus & Kurokawa, 2000), the effect of conflict on team identity moderated by team cultural composition is more pronounced when under relationship conflict compared to task conflict.

General Discussion

In a field study and a longitudinal field study, I examined 1) how conflict influences the proximal team outcome of team identity differently in culturally homogeneous East Asian and North American teams, and 2) at which point of team tenure culturally homogeneous North American and East Asian teams are likely to engage in and to avoid conflict. The results of our study offer several key findings. First, culturally homogeneous teams are not all the same, and there are differences in processes and outcomes that emphasize the importance of considering more nuanced distinctions of homogeneity in teams. Second, team cultural composition moderates the effect of conflict on team identity, such that higher levels of relationship conflict and task conflict hurt team identity for North American teams, but not East Asian teams. Third, team members working in East Asian homogenous teams are less likely to engage in conflict at the onset of the working relationship compared to members of the North American teams, but they are more likely than North Americans to engage in conflict throughout the other points in team tenure.

Theoretical implications

My work contributes to the conflict literature by examining how conflict evolves over time in culturally homogenous North American East Asian teams. Although some researchers have examined the temporal aspects of conflict in teams (e.g., Bradley, Klotz, Hamdani, & Brown, 2012; Greer, Jehn, & Mannix, 2008; Jehn & Mannix, 2001), the effect of team cultural composition on the temporal effects of conflict has yet to be studied. By looking at both *when* conflict is likely to occur in different culturally homogenous teams and *how* team cultural composition moderates the relation between conflict and team outcome, my findings address an important gap in the literature. Moreover, by examining the temporal aspects of conflict in

different homogeneous teams suggests that the theory of group development (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977) may not be applicable for all types of culturally homogeneous teams. Although North American teams did follow the pattern of this theory by engaging in more conflict in the storming stage followed by less conflict during the norming stage, the pattern was not the same for East Asians, as they underwent the storming stage later than North Americans.

I also extend prior work suggesting that team conflict negatively affects proximal team outcomes (see de Wit et al., 2012, for a review) by looking at the moderating role of team cultural composition on team conflict and team identity. It is particularly noteworthy that although East Asians engaged in more conflict at later times, it did not influence their sense of team identity. I developed my predictions based on prior research showing East Asians typically endorse a stronger style of dialectical reasoning compared to North Americans, and higher dialectical thinkers are likely to see both the positive and negative consequences of team conflict, thus associating conflict with not only negative, but also positive team experiences.

Limitations and directions for future research

Despite these contributions, some limitations to my work should be acknowledged. One limitation is that I did not examine process conflict. Although there has not been much research on process conflict compared to the other two forms of conflict, recent studies have shown process conflict to be an important independent predictor of team outcomes (Goncalo et al., 2010; Greer et al., 2008). Future research could benefit from investigating the effect of process conflict over time and its effect on team outcomes in different culturally homogeneous teams. Similar to relationship and task conflict, process conflict essentially involves disagreeing with team members. Given my results that there are cultural differences in members of North American and East Asians choose to engage in and avoid conflict during the team tenure, I

expect the same pattern for process conflict over time to emerge in culturally homogenous North American and East Asian teams; I also expect team cultural composition to moderate the negative relationship between process conflict and team identity.

Another limitation is that all data were collected from a common source, therefore I cannot rule out the possibility of common method variance (CMV). However, given the consistent pattern of interaction replicated in two studies, and given that interaction effects are less likely to be explained by CMV than linear relationships (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003), I can argue that it is unlikely that CMV is an explanation of my findings. Moreover, in both Study 1 and 2, team conflict and team identity were measured at different time points, therefore common-method variance should be reduced. Future research could benefit from looking at team conflict from different sources, such as using objective coders to rate the amount of the conflict in teams.

Another limitation pertains to generalizability of study findings because of the relative youth and inexperience of my student sample. However, teams examined in this study were not artificial teams created just for the purpose of the study; they were real student project teams. Further, students being assigned to a team to work on projects for a limited period of time (i.e., one academic semester) may resemble many teams in organizations such as project teams (Cohen & Bailey, 1997). Thus, results of this study can be generalizable to a degree to project teams in organizations. However, future research is needed to examine the effects of culturally homogeneous teams in different types of teams in organizations (e.g., management teams), with real employees, with a larger number of teams, and for a longer period of time.

One important area of future research is to empirically test mechanisms such as dialectical reasoning. I found that team cultural composition moderates the relation between conflict and

team identity, and I argued that the reason why East Asian team's identity is not negatively influenced by high levels of conflict is because they endorse a stronger style of dialectical reasoning and can integrate the positive and negative aspects of conflict (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2010b). Future research should directly measure and test dialectical reasoning. Moreover, given individual differences are dynamic, such that people who chronically endorse one style of reasoning can be primed to activate the alternative style of reasoning in the laboratory (e.g., Plaks, Stroessner, Dweck, & Sherman, 2001), and cultural differences can also be influenced by the social context (e.g., Hong, Benet-Martinez, Chiu, & Morris, 2003; Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2002), an avenue of future research could be to induce people's tendency to engage in dialectical reasoning in laboratory and examine whether the negative relation between team conflict and identity will be wiped out when people are induced to think dialectically.

Conclusion and Practical Implications

In conclusion, my results suggest that team cultural composition has important implications for when conflict is likely to occur, and the effect of conflict on team identity. My findings suggest that managers in North American cultures, where team conflict negatively impacts identity, should recognize and manage conflict in early team interactions, preventing escalation by reminding team members that some conflict is healthy in teams. In East Asian cultures, managers need not be as concerned about conflict negatively impacting team identity and are recommended instead to monitor team development and constructive conflict as it occurs at later stages.

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